



**U.S Environmental Protection Agency  
Region 9  
Indoor Environments Team**



***Tools for Schools in a Nutshell***

The Tools for Schools Program is described in detail, with many supporting materials in the EPA's Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Action Kit which can be viewed at the website: <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/> or ordered from the EPA clearing house at 800-438-4318. The following information and associated materials are enough to get your Tools for Schools Program up and running.

The purpose of the EPA's Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Tools for Schools (TFS) program is to "open the eyes" of school occupants and maintenance staff to the simple things they can do to improve the quality of the air inside their buildings. For school occupants this "eye-opening process" involves learning a little about: (1) building features and mechanical systems; and (2) occupant behaviors and activities which contribute to good or poor IAQ. It's not rocket science and it can make a big improvement in the indoor environment, making it easier to teach and to learn. Teachers can involve students and teach them about environmental principles which apply both indoors and out. For school maintenance staff the "eye-opening process" involves learning that the quality of indoor air is not just a simple comfort issue, it's important to health and productivity and that energy efficiency should not take precedent over good indoor air quality.

To get the maximum benefit from the Tools for Schools Program the school district should have someone who functions as a District IAQ Coordinator, i.e. someone who is aware of the importance of good IAQ and will follow-up with related issues and support a School-site Indoor Air Coordinator. The School-site IAQ Coordinator helps the school occupants learn about their role in assuring good IAQ and will serve as a conduit of information between the district maintenance staff and the school occupants. The School-site IAQ Coordinator can be a teacher, custodian, principle, administrative staff or volunteer parent. It can even be a student with faculty oversight.

### For the District & School-site contact or IAQ Coordinators

Step 1: Read the IAQ Backgrounder. This document summarizes the issue, and provides information on sources of indoor air contaminants, a description of ventilation systems and ways to correct poor indoor air quality. Another way to get a quick understanding of the issue is to look at the “Comic Book” powerpoint presentation to get an idea of the issue and the roles both district maintenance staff and school occupants play in assuring good indoor air quality. Originally created for kids, this presentation quickly gets to the heart of the indoor air quality issue and is a good entry to the subject for busy adults. Tour your school using the Illustrated Checklist to get an idea of conditions at your site.

Step 2: Look at the more detailed checklists for the teachers, custodial staff, office staff and maintenance and ventilation staff to get a better understanding of the building features and occupant actions which may affect indoor air quality. Decide which checklists you can do at your school, but at a minimum, consider doing the teachers checklist and the maintenance and ventilation checklists.

### For the School-site IAQ Coordinator

Step 3: Brief school-site staff at a faculty meeting or other convenient gathering using the briefing materials provided. Ask for assistance from anyone interested. Distribute checklists and the IAQ Backgrounder at that meeting or shortly afterwards. Distribute checklists to district maintenance and ventilation staff. Feel free to tailor the checklists to your own schools and to the time available.

Step 4: Review checklists to determine whether there are specific issues in certain classrooms and whether common themes are obvious. If you're involving the students, consider having them color-code the checklist items and plot them on a school floor-plan to use as a guide for the walk-through and for tracking changes from year to year.

Step 5: School Walk-through: Request participation from the District IAQ Coordinator or his/her staff (maintenance and ventilation staff), school-site nurse or health staff, other teachers and custodians, and walk through and around the school. Use the checklists and

develop a list of “findings.” Use the “boiler-plate” Walk-through report format to record what you find. Use the simple priority scheme in the report format to determine what to address first.

Step 6: Report to the teachers and school staff and District IAQ Coordinator on what you’ve found and which items can be addressed quickly. Many items may be addressed with education only. Discuss a time-table for those items which will take longer to correct. Identify issues which may be prevented in the future through education or modifications to maintenance practices.

Step 7: Repeat next school term and tell other schools and districts about the benefits you’ve achieved.

If you haven’t already done so, consider involving students in the activities. EPA has recognized students’ work at their Annual Tools for Schools Symposium in Washington, DC in December. Many school districts now see the benefits of enlisting environmental clubs in this work to improve or “restore” the indoor habitat. Consider applying for a Tools for Schools Award. EPA provides districts with awards ranging from the Tools for Schools Great Start Award, to the Excellence Award and Model of Sustained Excellence Awards. Visit the EPA’s website: <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/>.

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